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SUBJECT: IRAQ AMBASSADORS' FORUM - APRIL 30, 2007

REF: NONE

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SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Political Military Bureau hosted an Iraq Ambassadors' Forum on April 30. Ambassador David Satterfield, the Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State and Coordinator for Iraq, briefed on the challenges faced by Iraq in advance of the launch of the International Compact with Iraq (ICI) and Expanded Neighbors Ministerial Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. He also discussed key tasks ahead for the Iraqi government, regional engagement, and expectations for the two conferences. END SUMMARY.

SECURITY BACKGROUND

¶2. (SBU) The Political Military Bureau hosted an Iraq Ambassadors' Forum on April 30. Ambassadors and DCMs from 60 countries, including all contributing coalition nations, NATO, G-5, and neighbors were invited with 55 representatives attending.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador Satterfield began with a brief synopsis of the security situation as Operation Fardh al-Qanoon progresses: sectarian killings have dropped to Spring 2006 levels; forced expulsions from greater Baghdad neighborhoods appear to be lower; and there is limited anecdotal evidence that some expelled families have begun returning to their homes. These successes are attributed to a persistent and meaningful presence of U.S. and competent Iraqi forces. Unfortunately, some violence has now shifted out of Baghdad into areas like Ba'qubah in Diyala Province and other surrounding towns. However, Ambassador Satterfield noted, the purpose of the surge is not to achieve lasting and permanent security but rather to provide space for the Government of Iraq to get at the roots of the conflict through national reconciliation.

EXPECTATIONS OF GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ ACTION

¶4. (SBU) Emphasizing that "much more needs to be done and at a much more rapid pace," Ambassador Satterfield identified five actions that the GOI must complete as soon as possible:
--The various pieces of the draft hydrocarbons law package need to be approved by the Council of Representatives.

--The right de-Ba'athification reform legislation needs to be implemented.

--A program for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration should be approved in conjunction with an amnesty.

--Appropriate constitutional reform must be approved.

--Provincial elections need to take place before the end of the year (ideally with an open list system).

However, even if all of these actions are taken, full national reconciliation is not guaranteed. Iraqis need to begin thinking of national interests and unity rather than individual, partisan, or confessional interests. The role of the Coalition is to provide the security setting in which this reconciliation effort can succeed.

¶5. (SBU) On the economic front, Ambassador Satterfield noted that the Administration has requested four billion dollars from Congress despite the GOI's having 12.5 billion dollars remaining from its 2006 budget. The USG money is needed because Iraq lacks the capacity to disburse funds for critical needs quickly. Ambassador Satterfield noted that this is the last year that the Congress will likely be willing to consider providing this kind of assistance to Iraq. In the future, the Congress will reasonably expect Iraq to be able to execute its own budget. Iraq's progress on budget execution so far this year has given Ambassador Satterfield confidence that, by the end of this year, Iraq will be able to move its own monies.

REGIONAL DIPLOMACY AND THE SHARM EL-SHEIKH CONFERENCES

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¶6. (SBU) Regarding regional diplomacy in the wake of his recent visit throughout the Middle East and in advance of the May 3-4 Sharm-el-Sheikh meetings, Ambassador Satterfield noted a "sense of skepticism" regarding Iraq. One contributing factor to this skepticism is that real progress on the ground is not being adequately reported. Recent visits by Prime Minister Maliki throughout the region were crucial in enabling Middle Eastern leaders to witness first-hand Prime Minister Maliki's own commitment to reconciliation and reform. Egypt and Kuwait, in particular, exhibited supportive attitudes towards Iraq. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, did not host a visit from Prime Minister Maliki.

¶7. (SBU) In concluding, Ambassador Satterfield discussed expectations and background for the two Sharm el-Sheikh conferences which are intended to create a more supportive dialogue between Iraq, its neighbors, and the international community. Success or failure in Iraq will have meaningful consequences for all of these parties. The ICI document is a credit to the hard work by representatives of Iraq, the UN, the World Bank, and others and merits support. It represents a significant step forward. Saudi Arabia, despite its differences with the GOI, has offered 80 percent forgiveness of Iraqi debt. As for the Expanded Neighbors Ministerial, it should help to dispel distortions and confusions, legitimizing the concept of a democratic, post-Saddam Iraq. It should also send a message to Iraq's Sunni insurgents that violent acts are not supported by their Sunni brothers throughout the region. The draft of the Neighbors' communique is good and headed in an extremely promising direction for which the Government of Egypt deserves thanks for its efforts. However, it is critical that the neighbors move beyond rhetorical support, backing it up with action. There must be a concerted effort to dissuade further violence.

¶8. (SBU) Noting the speculation about possible meetings between the U.S. and Iran or Syria, Ambassador Satterfield stated, "We are professionals, and fully committed to working

on Iraq." If Iran or Syria want to discuss Iraq with us, then those discussions will be handled professionally.

Q & A

19. (SBU) Following Ambassador Satterfield's remarks, Iraqi Ambassador Samir al-Sumaidaie thanked Ambassador Satterfield for "covering the field remarkably well," adding that he looked forward to the meetings in Sharm el-Sheikh. A German embassy representative inquired about the status of the three working groups announced at the Neighbors prepcon in Baghdad.

Ambassador Satterfield responded that working groups on refugees, fuel and electricity, and border security had been announced on March 10 to be formally launched at the ministerial. The GOI also gave general approval of participation of non-neighbors in an advisory capacity at the March 10 meeting. The venue and timing of the initial working group meetings are still under discussion.

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